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**Review of Daniel Barbu, Nicolas Meylan and Youri Volokhine (Eds.) (2015).
Mondes clos: Les îles**

Riquet, Johannes

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Overall, I found this a solid and timely piece of work for the many who may want to gain deeper insights into the Cuban psyche through writings and art. The interpretations and details of the cultural works are excellent and will complement other future studies dealing with this island.

James P. Warren

The Open University, Milton Keynes, U.K.

james.warren@open.ac.uk

Daniel Barbu, Nicolas Meylan and Youri Volokhine (Eds.) (2015). *Mondes clos: Les îles*. Gollion: Infolio, 274pp. French. ISBN: 978-2884743549. US\$38.45.

A collection of essays on islands under the heading of *Closed worlds* might appear strangely out of place in a critical landscape that has come to prefer to think of islands in terms of interconnection and archipelagic relations rather than isolation and separation. The fact that this is the second volume of a series that began with a book on gardens might further lead one to suspect that its discussion of island imaginaries in literature, myth, politics and history subscribes to an essentialist conception of islands as naturally enclosed spaces. However, a closer look at the twelve chapters actually reveals a nuanced understanding of different modalities of imagined islandness. In the introductory essay, Youri Volokhine emphasizes that crossings, passages, and openings have been equally constitutive of island representations across the world as barriers, limits and borders (p. 12); and indeed, many of the contributors to this volume are committed to an exploration of islandness in a continuum between boundedness and interconnectedness, with a variety of intermediary positions.

Accordingly, its impressive range of topics, geographical locations and historical moments is one of the great strengths of the collection. The essays take the reader on an insightful journey through a global archipelago of real and imagined islands, spanning the oceans of the world and addressing texts from regions and periods rarely discussed in the island studies community. Thus, Philippe Bornet's article on the life and strange surprising adventures – *pace* Robinson Crusoe – of two mythical Indian islands, *Śvetadvīpa* (white island) and *Suvarṇadvīpa* (golden island), is an original piece of research that demonstrates how these islands were creatively appropriated by both British and Indian historians. Thus, as Bornet shows, the orientalist Francis Wilford (1761-1822) attempted to demonstrate that the white island of Indian mythology is in fact the island of Great Britain, creating an Anglocentric vision of the origins of Indian religion and myth. In his second example, Bornet shows how a historian of the Greater India Society, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar (1888-1980), used the myth of the golden island as evidence that India acted as a mighty colonial and civilizing power in southeast Asia in the early centuries AD. Anne-Caroline Rendu Loisel's contribution takes us to the mythical islands of ancient Mesopotamia. Explaining that Mesopotamia was in fact a world of islands until the fourth millennium BC due to very different climatic conditions, with island cities being linked via rivers and the sea, she argues that islands were subsequently relocated to the periphery of the known world in the cosmology of Mesopotamian maps and narratives like the Epic of Gilgamesh, where they functioned as liminal spaces for the for a meditation on the zone between the human and the divine, between mortality and immortality.

The broad geographical and historical focus of the collection has the added benefit of opening up and questioning the very notion of the island in the juxtaposition of diverging linguistic and cultural conceptions of island space. Thus, several contributors make it clear that the terms for 'island' in the texts they analyze do not necessarily correspond to our use of the concept. In his discussion of Book V of Diodorus of Sicily's *Bibliotheca historica*, Philippe Borgeaud reminds us that the Greek νῆσος (nêsos) implied a close relationship to the sea and could thus also refer to certain 'continental' spaces like peninsulas (p. 150). Rendu Loisel points out that the Akkadian term *nagû* is indeterminate, referring both to islands and to regions or administrative districts more generally (p. 91). Bornet points out that the Sanskrit term *dvîpa* in fact referred to a space surrounded by water on both sides, with the Indian subcontinent itself qualifying (p. 64). Finally, Frank Lestringant convincingly shows how the indeterminacy of the island concept in Marco Polo's late medieval *Travels* led to a confusion of maritime continental and insular spaces in early modern atlases (p. 205).

Despite these valuable observations, the collection would have gained in strength if the contributors had elaborated on the relevance of their case studies to a discussion of islandness more frequently and more thoroughly. While the scholarship displayed is often impressive, the essays sometimes remain rather narrow in focus. It is thus surprising that the authors largely ignore the rich body of island scholarship in both French and English by critics like Jean-Michel Racault, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, John R. Gillis and many others; while the specific topics of each article are carefully researched and coherently presented, the collection does not participate in a larger debate about islands: instead, it contributes to many individual debates. Nicolas Meylan's contribution, for instance, offers an interesting discussion of how thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas subtly critiqued Norway's expansionism by juxtaposing models of brute force with alternative models of political power; the article, however, does not address the importance of Iceland's island status in those texts beyond an attributive reference to Iceland as an insular community (p. 225). Borgeaud's discussion of Diodorus of Sicily's *nesiotike biblos* (island book), in turn, remains a largely descriptive account of the mythical significance of the islands described by the Sicilian Greek, even while it is valuable for reminding us of the classical origins of the *isolario* genre.

This being said, several articles do present theoretically sophisticated arguments that make important contributions to the study of islands. One of the most original essays in the collection is Doralice Fabiano's discussion of the mythological history of Delos. In Pindar's version of the myth, the Titan goddess Asteria became the floating island of Ortygia by jumping into the sea to escape from Zeus; only when offering to accept Apollo and his temple on her territory did she become the fixed island of Delos. Fabiano convincingly demonstrates that in its phase of errantry and infertility, the floating island was in fact a mere rock in the sea, associated with a female body unwilling to accept sexuality and matrimony; in the following, Delos became a rooted and 'proper' island made fertile and inhabitable by the offerings brought to Apollo – as one might add, it is only by becoming anchored that Ortygia/Delos becomes an island conforming to the UNCLOS definition of 1982, i.e. capable of sustaining human habitation. Lestringant's contribution, in turn, sheds light on the multiple sediments and geological strata (pp. 210-211) that make up the maps of early modern atlases like Guillaume Le Testu's *Cosmographie universelle*. Drawing on his work on the *isolario* genre (notably in his influential *Le livre des îles*), Lestringant relates the spatial mobility and drift of islands in early modern maps to the textual drift and dispersion characterizing the genre of the *isolario* itself. Lestringant thus presents a powerful argument about the time of islands in the

late medieval and early modern periods, when islands played an important part in the production of a dynamic, open and mobile spatiality (p. 207).

Other articles are to be valued for shedding light on the cultural and political import of specific aesthetic island constructions. These include Jan Blanc's article on the work of William Hodges, the painter who accompanied James Cook on his second voyage to the Pacific. While Blanc's essay does not engage with important pioneering work on Western 'scientific' representations of Pacific islands by scholars like K. R. Howe or Jeffrey Geiger, his contribution is an excellent examination of how artistic and scientific constructions of South Sea islands were intertwined; as Blanc shows, the enlightenment artist/scientist moved in a tension between charting the island as *terra incognita* and *terra cognita*, with the island being tied to the desire for novelty itself. Angela Benza, too, focuses on the island as an artistic image. Through an analysis of three portraits of Elizabeth I, she argues that the island was gradually constituted as the King's third body during Elizabeth's reign, adding a territorial body to the natural and political bodies. While her reading would have benefited from an engagement with broader discussions of the discursive construction of British insularity (e.g. Jonathan Scott's *When the Waves Ruled Britannia*), she convincingly traces how the island was gradually mobilized to construct a stable image of national, political and cultural unity and coherence. This is an image, one might add, which stretches from John of Gaunt's speech in Shakespeare's *Richard II* ('This royal throne of kings / This scepter'd isle') to the wartime rhetoric of Winston Churchill ('we shall [...] defend our island home').

Generally speaking, then, the high level of scholarship of the individual contributions makes this book a welcome addition to the bookshelf of anyone interested in the role of islands in the cultural imaginary, even if it does not make a significant intervention in the field of island studies *per se*. Its value lies elsewhere, and this academic *isolario* certainly does justice to the multiple meanings and conceptualizations of islands in the world archipelago. It is appropriate, therefore, that the volume should end with Neil Forsyth's excellent deconstructive reading of Andrew Marvell's 1654 poem 'Bermuda', which draws attention to the subtle ironies that destabilize the poem's Puritan praise of the strong hand of divine providence in leading the English to the islands of the New World. In a wonderfully poetic reflection on the fraught experience of the sea of islands off the American coast by English colonizers, Forsyth ends by suggesting that the poem's apparent vision of a happy island might in fact mask a much more uncertain experience: an experience of endlessly rowing in the sea with no (is)land in sight.

Johannes Riquet
University of Zurich, Switzerland
johannes.riquet@es.uzh.ch

Editor's note: *Island Studies Journal* has not yet published reviews of books about Mexican islands. And so, presenting these reviews of three books, published between 2010 and 2014, gives *ISJ* readers an opportunity to learn about some islands which belong or once belonged to Mexico. Among the numerous Mexican islands (4,111 according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography), some are notable for their history and geography, regardless of their surface area or population, and others for their environmental and social peculiarities, as is the case of the examples presented in these reviews.